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Approved For Release 2006/02/07 : CIA-RDP80R01720R004300030032-6

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20505

OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR

8 JUL 1970

The Honorable David Packard
Deputy Secretary of Defense
Washington, D. C.

Dear Dave,

Thank you for your response of 13 June 1970 to my memorandum of 21 May 1970 on air support for Royal Lao irregular forces in Northern Laos. In the context of your reply, I have asked our Vientiane Station Chief to provide me an absolute minimum level of air support requirements which must be available if we are to fulfill our mission and responsibilities in north Laos. We have gone over his reply, which is outlined below, and believe it represents a bare bones minimum and is the most economical use of the forces available.

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Night Support. All-night coverage with FAC and flare aircraft and gunships is required. In the event of multiple attacks, a force of at least eight A-1 aircraft which could be spread throughout the night would provide the necessary flexibility. A minimum of four FAC-flare ships and gunships (AC-119 or AC-47) are required. The above would represent 18 sorties per night.

-- Day Tactical Close Air Support. At least 40 USAF sorties should be made available to the Raven FAC force daily. The force should be evenly divided between jets and A-1 aircraft with the jets on alert and A-1's launched on a

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frag basis. Employed in this manner the A-1's can match or exceed target reaction of jets to exploit weather breaks. The cost of tanker support is minimized. All sorties should have secondary targets in the event weather precludes close support so that hard targets can be struck. Additionally, the six currently fragged jet/OV-10 FACs should be retained. The above requirement totals 46 sorties.

-- Limited Interdiction Program. The current interdiction program targeted against a series of traffic control points west of Ban Ban has been quite effective. In fact, it is possible that the one interdiction point being closed on Route 7 has denied the enemy his where-withal to supply a sustained offensive against Long Tieng and Sam Thong. A careful assessment has been made as to the size of the force necessary to keep these points closed and have concluded that, during the rainy season, six jets per day at random times on target and two jets per night for construction crew harassment would be the minimum to do the job. This would total eight sorties.

-- Strategic Rear Area Hard Target Program. We have assigned the lowest priority to this category based on the fact that we could not expect sufficient resources to be allocated to mount a meaningful program. We would recommend that aircraft flying day-time tactical close air support be given secondary target assignments in the event that weather prevents them from accomplishing their close

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support mission. We would not, therefore, envisage requesting a sortie allocation specifically for a hard target program.

To summarize, we feel that the absolute minimum daily USAF sortie level in north Laos would be 62 strike and ten flare FAC sorties. To fall below this would seriously jeopardize our ability to prevent the enemy from making major gains in north Laos during the next dry season and could run some risks during the present rainy season. We believe also that it contains the elements desired of economy compatible with your goal of achieving your planned air reduction. The effectiveness of USAF air power applied in support of the irregular operations in north Laos has been critically important. The enemy has failed to achieve what he certainly was originally capable of doing -- eliminating the Royal Lao Government presence in north central Laos. There is no question that the balanced application of tactical air support is a decisive factor in the relative success we have achieved in support of national policy objectives in Laos. I recognize your budgetary problems, but would appreciate your assurances that you can provide air support at the level indicated above. If you feel this is not feasible and that no commitment can be made, I believe we should report this situation to Dr. Kissinger and the President in order to make clear to them that with lesser support levels we risk serious weakening in our capability to defend north Laos, especially during the next dry season enemy offensive.

Sincerely,

/s/ Richard Helms
Richard Helms
Director

Signature Recommended:

151 THH
Deputy Director for Plans

6 July 70
Date

DDP/CFE/TBL: [] (6 July 1970)

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